Music ROCK

The rock 'n' roll era : the New

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Shirley Goodman and Leonard Lee (Shirley and Lee) toured as "Sweethearts of the Blues" although they were not lovers.

THE NEW ORLEANS SOUND

New Orleans' second-line rhythms run from the pre-jazz, brass-band era of Buddy Bolden right up to the Neville Brothers. Second-line rhythms are meant to simulate the offbeat provided by clapping marchers who sashay behind the band in a traditional funeral parade. But the form, which usually includes a piano player as lead instrumentalist, reached its national apex with the Crescent City R & B and rock 'n' roll of the '50s and early '60s. Professor Longhair, the most idiosyncratic of the New Orleans piano stars, and Fats Domino, the most commercial, suggest the parameters of that era.

Longhair, whose real name was Henry Roland Byrd, was born upstate in Bogalusa, Louisiana, in 1918, but his family moved to New Orleans when he was a child. By the time he first recorded for Star Talent in 1949, he had absorbed several generations of piano styles in that most "foreign" of American cities on the banks of the Mississippi where the river flows into the Gulf of Mexico. Longhair blended dollops of mambo, calypso and especially rumba to create dexterous R & B with all the momentum of a hurricane.

Among the four sides he cut for Star Talent were versions—different from the ones here—of both **Bald Head** and **Go to the Mardi Gras** (originally called *Mardi Gras in New Orleans).* Because the recordings were made at a nonunion session, Star Talent owner Jesse Erickson ran into legal trouble and quickly pulled the records from the market. The versions included here are therefore the more familiar ones. *Bald Head,* according to Longhair, was for "a little girlfriend I used to have" at the Pepper Pot, a club across the river in Gretna where he was once in residence. *Go to the Mardi Gras* became one of the city's carnival standards, reissued annually in time for the Mardi Gras street parades. With his braying vocals, rhythmic turns and slippery piano lines, Longhair recorded only sporadically and without national success most of his life (he died in 1980). He dropped out more than once before being rediscovered locally in the '70s and becoming the patron saint of New Orleans R & B, with the city's top club, Tipitina's, named after one of his songs.

Fats Domino parlayed a more laconic, easygoing style into the longest string of hits to come out of New Orleans. Most were arranged and produced by Dave Bartholomew, who also had his own Dixieland-style jump blues band. Bartholomew, who discovered Domino in 1949 at the Hideaway club, nurtured Domino's R & B sound for years before the team achieved crossover success with *Ain't That a Shame,* a 1955 rock 'n' roll hit. **All By Myself,** the follow-up single, typified Domino's breakthrough style, while **Going to the River,** a blues tune, captured the early Fats Domino sound.

The Spiders, once a gospel quintet called the Delta Southernaires, were the only major New Orleans vocal group in the classic tradition of the Ravens. **I Didn't Want to Do It,** their first single, was also their biggest. They were discovered by the secretary to Cosimo Matassa, in whose Rampart Street studio they, and most of the other acts featured here, recorded (using basically the same sidemen). The Hawkettes, who over several decades gradually evolved into the Meters and then the Neville Brothers, transformed vocal-group stylings into the chants of the Mardi Gras Indian tribes for the pulsating **Mardi Gras Mambo.** Written mainly by local DJ Jack the Cat, the song now ranks with Longhair's Mardi Gras single as a carnival perennial.

Sugarboy Crawford, who was raised uptown where the Indian tribes were strongest, recorded one of their chants under the title **Jockomo** (which the Dixie Cups made into a pop hit in 1965 as *Iko Iko*). Along with Crawford, Smiley Lewis was one of New Orleans' few guitar heroes; his salacious **One Night** was covered two years later by Elvis

Presley, who cleaned up the lyrics.

Shirley and Lee, like Lewis, the Spiders and Domino, also were produced by Bartholomew. Eddie Messner of Liberty/Imperial picked the voices of Shirley and Lee out of a tape cut with a large group of kids at Cosimo Matassa's when the two singers were teenagers. Shirley Goodman and Leonard Lee toured as "Sweethearts of the Blues" while recording songs that implied (falsely) they were lovers. But *Let the Good Times Roll* proved to be their only pop hit, although **Feel So Good** rode high on the R & B charts.

I'm Gonna Be a Wheel Someday is familiar as a Fats Domino hit, but Domino learned it from Bobby Mitchell, a versatile singer whose high tenor resembled that of Clyde McPhatter. Mitchell got the tune from its author, Roy Hayes, a white rockabilly singer with whom he performed on a regular Sunday afternoon show in Baton Rouge. Little Richard's **Send Me Some Lovin'** is his most conventional record with the feel of the Crescent City. This is particularly ironic since it is also the first Specialty hit he cut outside New Orleans, using his own band, the Upsetters, instead of the usual session crew. Johnny Adams, a former gospel singer who worked as a roofer, went secular with **I Won't Cry.** Adams' neighbor Dorothy Labostrie scribbled out the song in a frenzy after her boyfriend left her.

Producer-arranger Allen Toussaint, working for the Minit and Instant labels from 1959 to 1963, devised a lighter and more melodic sound that took New Orleans R & B into a new phase. Toussaint, who played piano and wrote most of the hits he produced, held court in the front room of his parents' house, jamming daily with acts such as Irma Thomas, the Showmen, Ernie K-Doe and Benny Spellman. At night, the musicians would enter the studio to record new material, all of them singing backup on each others' efforts. Toussaint wrote several hit songs under the name Naomi Neville. He recalls writing Thomas' **It's Raining** one afternoon at the house with her sitting right there

The Spiders, the only major New Orleans vocal group

while rain pounded on the roof. Of K-Doe's **A Certain Girl,** he said, "When young people hang out in clubs, there's always somebody they're looking at, even when they're with somebody else—always someone who catches your eye but you don't act on it." Spellman sang the unforgettable bass parts on K-Doe's *Mother-in-Law;* Toussaint then composed **Lipstick Traces (On a Cigarette)** for Spellman, using the line "Don't leave me no mo' " from K-Doe's hit. Toussaint doesn't remember the origins of Spellman's **Fortune Teller,** only that, "I enjoyed doing it because I could tell in the middle it would be one of those songs you'd have to get to the end of before you got the message." Although he didn't write it, Toussaint was also responsible for the Caribbean sound of Chris Kenner's **Something You Got,** a single that sold 30,000 copies locally (while stiffing nationally) because it was tailored to the Popeye, then the hottest dance in town.

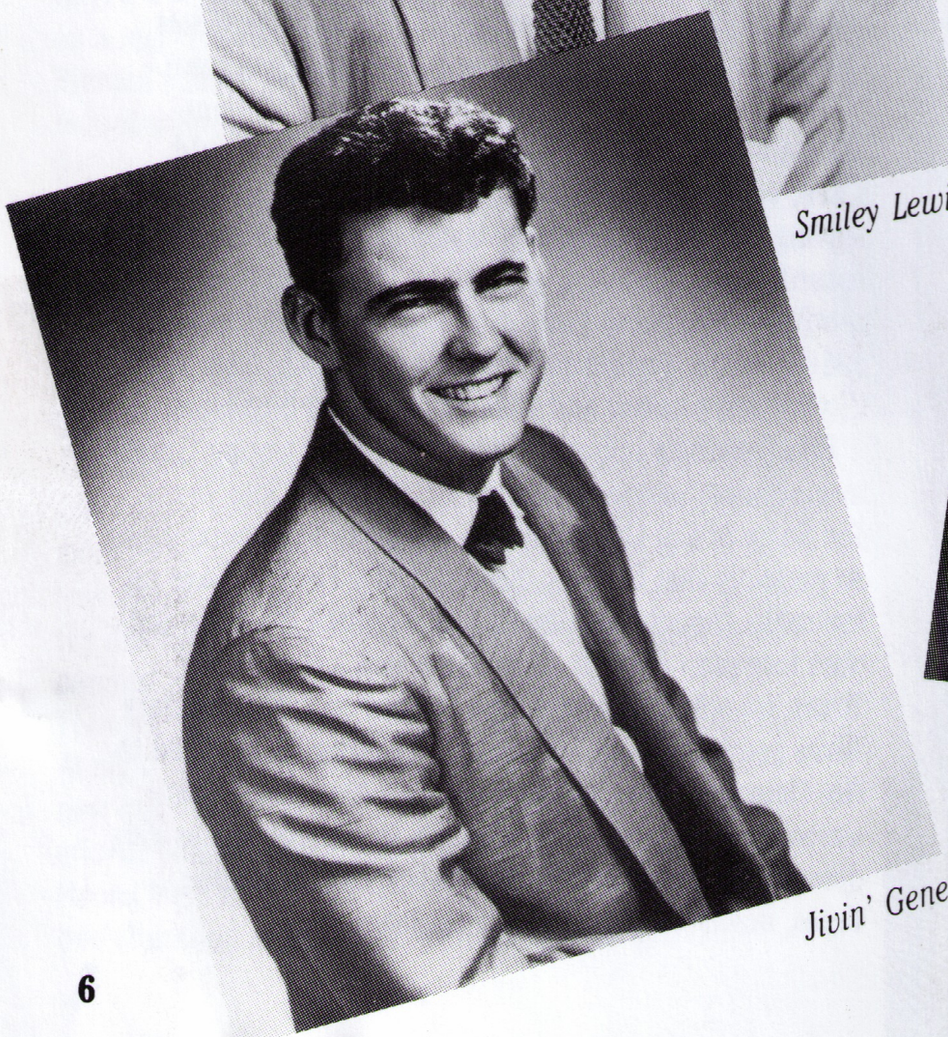
Irma Thomas had one great moment after leaving Toussaint for the West Coast. **Wish Someone Would Care,** written by Thomas as she was in the process of leaving her second husband, is one of the most desolate records in all of rock 'n' roll. Alvin "Shine" Robinson, a protégé of Joe Jones (who'd hit with *You Talk Too Much* in 1960), cut his wonderful **Down Home Girl** in New York City for Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller's Red Bird label.

Fats Domino's influence was tremendous among Cajuns in southwest Louisiana and even spilled over into Texas. Joe Barry of Cut-Off, Louisiana, got Domino's sound down so perfectly that Domino, hearing **I'm a Fool to Care** on the radio, thought he himself had recorded the song and then forgotten about it. Jivin' Gene was a Port Arthur, Texas, oil refinery worker who hooked up with legendary Texas producer Huey Meaux for **Breaking Up Is Hard to Do.** Gene, who was having marital problems at the time, wrote the song while telling Meaux all his troubles as they drove in Meaux's car from his barber shop in Winnie, Texas, down to Jasper to have his taxes done.

What's most remarkable about this collection of New Orleans recordings is that, while very few were big hits, nearly all have become standards or cult favorites. And nearly all have been remade at least once, by artists as influential as the Rolling Stones, Warren Zevon and Elvis Presley.

—John Morthland

Smiley Lewis



Jivin' Gene

Alvin Robinson

DISCOGRAPHY

**Indicates highest Billboard chart position*

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1. Go to the Mardi Gras Professor Longhair • *Music and lyrics by Roland Byrd and Thomas Terry. Chappell & Co., Inc./Intersong USA. ASCAP. Ron 329 (1959). Courtesy of Rounder Records. Did not chart.*

2. All By Myself Fats Domino • *Music and lyrics by Fats Domino and Dave Bartholomew. Travis Music Co. BMI. Imperial 5357 (1955). Courtesy of EMI, a Division of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. No. 3 (R & B)**

3. Feel So Good Shirley and Lee • *Music and lyrics by Leonard Lee. Atlantic Music Corp. BMI. Aladdin 3289 (1955). Courtesy of EMI, a Division of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. No. 2 (R & B)**

4. Lipstick Traces (On a Cigarette) Benny Spellman • *Music and lyrics by Naomi Neville. CBS Unart Catalog, Inc. BMI. Minit 644 (1962). Courtesy of EMI, a Division of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. No. 80**

5. Breaking Up Is Hard to Do Jivin' Gene and the Jokers • *Music and lyrics by Gene Bourgeois and Huey P. Meaux. Songs of PolyGram International Inc. BMI. Mercury 71485 (1959). Courtesy of PolyGram Special Products, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 69**

6. I Won't Cry Johnny Adams • *Music and lyrics by Dorothy Labostrie and Joseph Ruffino. Duchess Music/Makedwde Pub. Co. BMI. Ric 961 (1961). Courtesy of Sun Entertainment Corporation. Did not chart.*

7. I'm Gonna Be a Wheel Someday Bobby Mitchell • *Music and lyrics by Dave Bartholomew and Roy Hayes. CBS Unart Catalog, Inc. BMI. Imperial 5475 (1957). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. Did not chart.*

8. Send Me Some Lovin' Little Richard • *Music and lyrics by Lloyd Price and John Marascalco. EMI Blackwood Music, Inc., under license from ATV Music. BMI. Specialty 598 (1957). Courtesy of Specialty Records, Inc. No. 54**

9. Something You Got Chris Kenner • *Music and lyrics by Chris Kenner. Thursday Music Corp. BMI. Instant 3237 (1961). Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. Did not chart.*

10. I Didn't Want to Do It The Spiders • *Music and lyrics by Adolph Smith and Harry Gladstone. EMI Unart Catalog Inc. BMI. Imperial 5265 (1954). Courtesy of EMI, a Division of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. No. 3 (R & B)**

11. It's Raining Irma Thomas • *Music and lyrics by Naomi Neville. CBS Unart Catalog, Inc. BMI. Minit 653 (1962). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. Did not chart.*

12. Fortune Teller Benny Spellman • *Music and lyrics by Naomi Neville. CBS Unart Catalog, Inc. BMI. Minit 644 (1962). Courtesy of EMI, a Division of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. Did not chart.*

13. A Certain Girl Ernie K-Doe • *Music and lyrics by Naomi Neville. CBS Unart Catalog, Inc. BMI. Minit 634 (1961). Courtesy of EMI, a Division of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. No. 71**

14. Going to the River Fats Domino • *Music and lyrics by Fats Domino and Dave Bartholomew. Unart Catalog, Inc. BMI. Imperial 5231 (1953). Courtesy of EMI, a Division of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. No. 2 (R & B)**

15. Bald Head Roy Byrd (Professor Longhair) • *Music and lyrics by Roland Byrd. Professor Longhair Music. BMI. Mercury 8175 (1950). Courtesy of PolyGram Special Products, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 5 (R & B)**

16. One Night Smiley Lewis • *Music and lyrics by Dave Bartholomew and Pearl King. CBS Unart Catalog, Inc. BMI. Imperial 5380 (1956). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. No. 11 (R & B)**

17. Let's Live Aaron Neville • *Music and lyrics by Naomi Neville. EMI Unart Catalog, Inc. BMI. Minit 631 (1961). Courtesy of EMI, a Division of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. Did not chart.*

18. Jockomo Sugarboy Crawford • *Music and lyrics by James Crawford. Arc Music Corp. BMI. Checker 787 (1954). Courtesy of Chess/MCA Records, Inc. Did not chart.*

19. Mardi Gras Mambo The Hawkettes • *Music and lyrics by Frank Adams, Bill Elliot and Lou Welsch. Arc Music Corp. BMI. Chess 1591 (1954). Courtesy of Chess/MCA Records, Inc. Did not chart.*

20. Down Home Girl Alvin Robinson • *Music and lyrics by Jerry Leiber and Arthur Butler. Jerry Leiber Music/Mike Stoller Music. ASCAP. Red Bird 10010 (1964). Courtesy of Sun Entertainment Corporation. Did not chart.*

21. I'm a Fool to Care Joe Barry • *Music and lyrics by Ted Daffan. APRS. BMI. Smash 1702 (1961). Courtesy of Huey P. Meaux. No. 24**

22. Wish Someone Would Care Irma Thomas • *Music and lyrics by Irma Thomas. CBS Unart Catalog, Inc. BMI. Imperial 66013 (1964). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets. No. 17**

The New Orleans Sound

1. **Go to the Mardi Gras** Professor Longhair
2. **All By Myself** Fats Domino
3. **Feel So Good** Shirley and Lee
4. **Lipstick Traces (On a Cigarette)** Benny Spellman
5. **Breaking Up Is Hard to Do** Jivin' Gene and the Jokers
6. **I Won't Cry** Johnny Adams
7. **I'm Gonna Be a Wheel Someday** Bobby Mitchell
8. **Send Me Some Lovin'** Little Richard
9. **Something You Got** Chris Kenner
10. **I Didn't Want to Do It** The Spiders
11. **It's Raining** Irma Thomas
12. **Fortune Teller** Benny Spellman
13. **A Certain Girl** Ernie K-Doe
14. **Going to the River** Fats Domino
15. **Bald Head** Roy Byrd (Professor Longhair)
16. **One Night** Smiley Lewis
17. **Let's Live** Aaron Neville
18. **Jockomo** Sugarboy Crawford
19. **Mardi Gras Mambo** The Hawkettes
20. **Down Home Girl** Alvin Robinson
21. **I'm a Fool to Care** Joe Barry
22. **Wish Someone Would Care** Irma Thomas

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The New Orleans Sound was produced by Time-Life Music in cooperation with Warner Special Products. Digitally remastered at Hit and Run Studios, Rockville, Md.

The Author: John Morthland has been an associate editor for *Rolling Stone* and *Creem.* He has freelanced for virtually every rock magazine published during the last 20 years.

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THE ROCK 'N' ROLL ERA
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THE NEW ORLEANS SOUND

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